



# Annual Participant Survey Report

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By Carol Behrer, Executive Director  
Youth Policy Institute of Iowa



## Introduction

The [Iowa Aftercare Services Network](#) provides services and support to help youth and young adults who exit foster care near the age of 18 make a successful transition to adulthood in the areas of education, employment, housing, health, life skills, and relationships. The Network supports young people up to the age of 23 as they pursue self-sufficiency. Aftercare Self-Sufficiency Advocates (“Advocates”) meet with young people regularly to set goals, develop individual action plans, build skills, and connect to resources.

The Network administers an annual survey to solicit feedback from Aftercare participants and assess their satisfaction with the services they are receiving. Survey results are used to inform policy and program decisions as part of the Network’s ongoing quality assurance efforts. The annual survey is also used to provide a snapshot of the status of participants in terms of three primary outcomes: sufficient resources, stable housing, and supportive relationships.

In March 2021, 384 currently active Aftercare participants completed the confidential survey. This includes young people receiving services from all eight agencies in the Network. Response rates were proportionate to agencies’ caseloads. The agencies serving the Des Moines and Cedar Rapids areas accounted for more than 40% of all survey responses.

Of all respondents, 320 young people (ages 18 to 21) were receiving core services at the time of the survey, and 56 participants (those age 21 and 22), were receiving Extended Services. Eight (8) respondents did not provide their age or other demographic information. Of all continuing core participants who met with an Advocate at least once during the month of March, 91.7% completed a survey (n=349).<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of respondents completed the survey electronically, but other options were made available for participants without online access.

This report shows survey results for both Core and Extended recipients separately and combined. Respondents who did not provide their age are included in the total data, but not in the disaggregated Core or Extended Services responses.

## Participant Demographics

Similar to the SFY 2020 survey, just over half (55%) of 2021 respondents identified as female.

Gender Identity			
	Core (n=320)	Extended (n=56)	Total (n=376)
<b>Female</b>	54.4%	57.1%	54.8%
<b>Male</b>	44.7%	42.9%	44.4%
<b>Other</b>	0.6%	0.0%	0.8%
<b>Prefer Not to Answer</b>	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%

<sup>1</sup> Because the survey results are used to assess the quality of services participants receive over time, young people completing intakes during the month the survey is administered are not asked to complete a survey.

Survey respondents trended older in 2021 than previous years, in part because fewer young people are aging out of foster care and becoming eligible for Aftercare services, while those that do participate in the program are staying involved longer. SFY 2021 is also the first full year of providing Extended Services for 21 and 22 year olds and the first time these older participants were included in the annual survey. Extended Services are more flexible and do not require monthly participation to remain eligible. Rather these services are available when young people need assistance.

<b>Age Distribution by Survey Year</b>			
	<b>2019 (n=371)</b>	<b>2020 (n=354)</b>	<b>2021 (n=370)</b>
<b>18</b>	31.0%	28.8%	21.6%
<b>19</b>	29.4%	38.1%	27.8%
<b>20</b>	39.6%	33.0%	35.4%
<b>21</b>	--	--	7.6%
<b>22</b>	--	--	7.6%

Aftercare participants are racially and ethnically diverse. When asked which race/ethnicity they “most closely identify with,” about one-third of the respondents overall identified as people of color. This is consistent with the racial and ethnic makeup of Aftercare participants in prior years and with the overall population of those who have recently aged out of court-ordered, out-of-home placements in Iowa ([Youth Policy Institute of Iowa](#)). Extended participants are more likely to be Black or multi-racial than core participants.

<b>Race/Ethnicity “Most Closely Identified With”</b>			
	<b>Core (n=320)</b>	<b>Extended (n=56)</b>	<b>Total (n=376)</b>
<b>African American or Black</b>	15.0%	23.2%	16.2%
<b>Asian American</b>	0.6%	0.0%	0.3%
<b>Hispanic or Latino</b>	4.1%	3.6%	4.0%
<b>Native American or American Indian</b>	2.2%	0.0%	1.2%
<b>Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander</b>	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%
<b>White</b>	66.9%	58.9%	65.7%
<b>Multiracial</b>	9.7%	14.3%	10.4%
<b>Prefer Not to Answer</b>	1.3%	0.0%	1.0%

## Participant Outcomes & Satisfaction

The Aftercare contract includes performance measures in three key areas which are monitored, in part, using questions in the annual satisfaction survey:

1. **Sufficient Resources:** “Last month, did you have enough money or other resources to cover your expenses? (include your income, money from PAL/vendor payments, and any other assistance)?”
2. **Stable Housing:** “Do you currently have a safe and stable place to live?”
3. **Supportive Relationships:** “Do you have a positive relationship with at least one adult in your community?”

Nearly all (94% or more) of both Core and Extended Services respondents reported that they had stable housing and supportive relationships. Core Services recipients, many of whom receive monthly financial assistance from the Preparation for Adult Living program, were more likely to report that they had sufficient resources to meet their expenses than the older young people participating in Extended Services. Limited emergency financial assistance from the program is available to young adults accessing services at age 21 and 22. Many Extended Services recipients may therefore be accessing services precisely because they have experienced financial setbacks and are not able to meet their living expenses.

Self-Sufficiency Performance Measures			
<i>% Responding “Yes”</i>	<i>Core (n=320)</i>	<i>Extended (n=56)</i>	<i>Total (n=384)</i>
<i>Sufficient Resources</i>	81.3%	62.5%	78.7%
<i>Stable Housing</i>	95.9%	98.2%	96.1%
<i>Supportive Relationships</i>	98.1%	94.6%	97.7%

Recognizing that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected everyone this past year and especially former foster youth who are particularly vulnerable to economic downturns, this year’s survey asked how the pandemic had impacted them. Results are shown in the table below.

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic		
<i>Areas</i>	<i>Examples of Impact</i>	<i>Total (n=380)</i>
<i>Employment</i>	Lost job, reduced hours, unable to work	52.1%
<i>Education</i>	Education interrupted or had to dropout	24.7%
<i>Housing</i>	Lost housing, got behind on rent or utilities, forced to move	21.6%
<i>Relationships</i>	Unable to stay in touch with family or friends	26.6%
<i>Mental Health</i>	Increased stress, depression, other MH concerns	62.9%
<i>Transportation</i>	Could not afford transportation costs	19.7%

Advocates strive to establish positive relationships with young people participating in the program and to help them become more confident and hopeful about their futures – an important indicator of long-term success. Of all survey respondents, 94.6% reported that meeting with an Aftercare Advocate “always” or “almost always” helped them feel more hopeful, an indication that Aftercare is helping young adults develop resilience.

<b>"Does your current Advocate help you feel more hopeful about your future?" (n=384)</b>			
	<b>Core (n=320)</b>	<b>Extended (n=56)</b>	<b>Total (n=384)</b>
<b>Always</b>	76.3%	83.9%	77.1%
<b>Almost Always</b>	18.4%	12.5%	17.5%
<b>Sometimes</b>	4.4%	3.6%	4.7%
<b>Not Really</b>	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%
<b>Too Soon to Tell</b>	0.6%	0.0%	0.5%

Participants were asked to assess how helpful the program has been in terms of six skills that are important to a successful transition to adulthood. For all six areas, the vast majority of respondents described the program as “somewhat” or “very helpful” to them as they work with Advocates in the areas areas of education, employment, health, and relationships.

<b>"Please share how helpful Aftercare/PAL has been to you in the following areas" (n=384)</b>				
	<b>Very helpful</b>	<b>Somewhat helpful</b>	<b>Not at all helpful</b>	<b>Too soon to tell</b>
<b>Setting &amp; pursuing personal goals</b>	84.9%	13.5%	0.5%	1.0%
<b>Improving my ability to solve problems</b>	77.1%	20.6%	0.5%	1.8%
<b>Building positive relationships with others</b>	71.1%	25.5%	1.3%	2.1%
<b>Accessing community resources</b>	83.6%	14.8%	0.3%	1.3%
<b>Holding me accountable</b>	84.1%	14.3%	0.0%	1.6%
<b>Managing my money</b>	76.8%	19.3%	1.8%	2.1%

As a culminating question related to participants satisfaction with the Aftercare services they have received, the survey invites respondents to rate Aftercare’s overall helpfulness on a five-point scale. The average rating by all respondents was 4.7, with a significant majority (76.8%) offering a five-star rating. Fewer than 5% gave Aftercare less than a four-star rating.

<b>“How helpful is Aftercare/PAL to you overall?”</b>			
<b>Five-star rating where “1” is not at all helpful and “5” is very helpful (n=384)</b>			
	<b>Core (n=320)</b>	<b>Extended (n=56)</b>	<b>Total (n=384)</b>
<b>1</b>	0.6%	0.0%	0.5%
<b>2</b>	0.9%	0.0%	0.8%
<b>3</b>	3.8%	1.8%	3.4%
<b>4</b>	18.4%	16.1%	18.5%
<b>5</b>	76.3%	82.1%	76.8%

Young adults participating in Aftercare do so on a voluntary basis. While the annual participant survey historically has shown very high levels of satisfaction with the services provided, it could be that those who are dissatisfied simply do not stay involved in the program long enough to be surveyed for their feedback. However, average duration of participation in Aftercare remains high (averaging 2+ years, including temporary interruptions in services). Very few leave the program within 3 months of accessing services, suggesting that there are relatively few who are dissatisfied or not finding value in the services by “voting with their feet” and choosing to discontinue their participation before having the opportunity to complete a survey.

## Comments from Young People

In each year’s survey, participants are invited to share additional comments about their experience in Aftercare in response to an open-ended question. Typically, the majority of comments convey a positive view of Aftercare services generally, and many participants take the opportunity to praise their Advocate specifically. Participants also offer valuable constructive criticism. Examples of comments from this year’s respondents are shown below.

<b>“Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your experience in Aftercare?” (n=124)</b>	
The program was genuinely there during covid, don't know where I would be [without it], very very helpful	[My Advocate] has saved my life and doesn't even know it.
I love aftercare and my worker. It really has helped me stay on my feet and my worker has provided amazing support. She always is professional but very caring!	People coming out of foster care, take advantage of this program. It is very beneficial.
[My Advocate] is a very sweet and caring person. always helping me with my problem and helping me find a solution to them.	I’m glad I’m in aftercare because without the help I’m getting, I would be lost and wouldn’t know anything, but I’m just thankful.

<b>“Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your experience in Aftercare?” (n=124)</b>	
<p>If it wasn't for [my Advocate's] persistence with me I doubt I wouldn't have been nearly as successful as a adult. She has made sure to hold me accountable every step of the way and has helped me build the necessary skills to be a responsible person.</p>	<p>Aftercare has helped provide the resources for me to thrive and is helping me create a stable financial foundation.</p> <p>While I have not yet achieved a fully stable financially, with aftercare helping me I believe I'll be able to do it.</p>
<p>My advocate is very straight forward. If I ask a question she gets back to me in a timely manner... and she is very active in trying to help me reach my goals. Good program, good advocate!</p>	<p>[My Advocate] is truly a wonderful person. She has helped me see the many paths I am completely capable of pursuing. I'm lucky to have such a helpful, caring, and kind advocate.</p>
<p>[My Advocate] . . . has been a consistently positive influence/role model. Through out our times [he] has been the realest/most genuine support service I've experienced and by far the most helpful!!</p>	<p>My advocate has been a support system to me whenever I felt like I had absolutely no one.</p>
<p>[My Advocate] has helped me immensely in my journey to become a responsible adult. In my time with her I've developed the ability to budget and save, as well as reach out when I need to.</p>	<p>[My Advocate] is always there for me when I have questions about anything, she helps me when I'm struggling, and is always there to listen to my problems and help me figure them out.</p>
<p>My workers have always been there for me through my very rough times and I don't think I would be where I am without them.</p>	<p>Aftercare is an extremely helpful resource choosing what to pursue is just difficult.</p>

## About the Youth Policy Institute of Iowa

The Youth Policy Institute of Iowa is a non-profit intermediary organization with expertise in policies, programs and practices that affect young people transitioning from adolescence to adulthood, especially those with experience in Iowa’s child welfare or juvenile justice systems. Since 2002, YPII has provided policy development, coordination, quality assurance, and evaluation support for the [Iowa Aftercare Services Network](#) under a subcontract with YSS, the lead agency of the Network.

### For More Information:

#### [Youth Policy Institute of Iowa](#)

6200 Aurora Avenue, Suite 206E  
Des Moines, IA 50322  
Phone: 515-727-4220

#### [YSS](#)—IASN Lead Agency

420 Kellogg  
Ames, IA 50010  
Phone: 515-233-3141